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GAINSBOROUGH'S MASTERPIECE; "THE MORNING WALK."

IT is the purpose of The Lotus Magazine to publish, as occasion offers, prints of masterpieces in art. The first of these appears in this issue and is a print from what many consider Gainsborough's finest work, his portrait canvas of Squire and Mrs. Hallett in landscape, better known by the title, "The Morning Walk." The picture is in the collection of Lord Rothschild. Oddly enough, and in spite of the admiration it has always excited, no important engraving of it appears to have been made, a further reason for its selection by The Lotus.

The picture was executed during the artist's latest and best period. The figures are life size; the man in dark attire with white stockings, the lady in a light gray dress with greenish yellow ribbons and a large hat. A white pomeranian dog is beside her. The size of the canvas is ninety-three by seventy inches.

According to tradition Mr. and Mrs. Hallett sat to Gainsborough immediately after their marriage and his intention was to suggest their first promenade as husband and wife. If this is correct, he succeeded admirably in carrying out his intention. The aspect of the charming young couple toward each other are eloquent of novel relations, of the man's pride and the woman's tender confusion.

In "Gainsborough, His Place in English Art," Armstrong points out that the felicity with which the artist, especially in his later years, combines figures and their setting amounts practically to fusion, and adds that in "The Morning Walk" it is difficult to recall where the trees end and the charming figures begin, so complete is the envelope of sentiment that embraces all. The same is true of all the pictures dating from his last decade in which his sympathies were engaged. Indeed Gainsborough's greatness depended on the quickness with which he saw beauty and answered to its summons, and on that faculty for artistic synthesis that enabled or rather compelled him to see and select only those notes that make a pictorial chord.

With him the impression was everything. His finest things are all impromptus. It might almost be said that when he deliberated he was lost. A sympathetic personality had the power to set his brain burning with creation at a touch. In "The Morning Walk" there is not discoverable a trace of that mental preparation often evident in Sir Joshua.

Hodgson and Eaton in their papers on the Royal Academy dwell on Gainsborough's impromptu method. He made an appointment and thought of it no more. "When the hour arrived, he sat down before his easel with a mind as blank as the canvas before him. Supposing his sitter to have been a young lady. He eyes her, chats with her, draws her out, gets excited, strange flashes of drollery and absurdity escape him. She turns in her chair. Her face lights up. 'Stay as you are!' He has seen the picture and, seizing palette and brush, he begins."

Referring specifically to "The Morning Walk" Armstrong says that while sweeping assertions are risky, he does not think there is much danger in declaring this portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Hallett to be the finest picture painted in the eighteenth century. "If I followed my own convictions I should say since the deaths of Rembrandt and Velasquez. In pure artistry the only things of its own time to be set near it are a few Watteaus, a Chardin or two, and three pictures by Sir Joshua Reynolds—the three I mean being the 'Nelly O'Brien' in the Wallace Gallery, the 'Duchess of Devonshire with her Baby' at Chatsworth, and Sir Charles Tennant's 'Lady Crosbie'."

Thus in "The Morning Walk" The Lotus presents its readers with Gainsborough's masterpiece, a carefully guarded treasure of a great collection.



"THE MORNING WALK"

By THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH
THE LOTUS COLLECTION
OF MASTERPIECES, NO. 1